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ABSTRACT

Concerned with how new schooling structures, once implemented, will remain in place, this paper reviews findings of the International School Improvement Project (ISIP) about institutionalization and suggests their application to educational restructuring results. According to the ISIP study, indicators of complete institutionalization include acceptance by relevant actors, routinization of the change, widespread usage, firmly expected continuation, and legitimacy or invisibility of the change. The restructuring literature largely sidesteps the topic of institutionalization. A more general literature review reveals institutionalization's dependence on high-quality innovations, local and external contexts, and the change process itself. A case study analysis discloses other key factors, such as policy-level confirmation, vision-building, external and internal support, school leader maintenance, staff ownership, and embedment. Institutionalization is not monolithically determined, but is ensured by a configuration of key aspects. The ISIP results suggest action implications for those desiring to institutionalize change in schools: applying alternative frames (managed change, cultural change, assimilation, and conflict); achieving district-school congruence; providing extra energy resources; allowing sufficient time; developing a clear, shared vision; envisioning implementation as prefigured institutionalization; managing transition effectively; stressing personal and organizational learning; routinizing internal support; and avoiding staleness. (21 references) (MLH)

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WILL NEW STRUCTURES STAY RESTRUCTURED? [1]

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School restructuring, seen as a "third wave" of educational reform, like previous waves, carries high hopes and an optimism that, if not unbridled, is certainly expansive enough to have fueled a great deal of well-intentioned effort, at levels varying from teaching/learning processes through the organization of schools, to governance systems, school-based management and parental choice.

In this paper, we consider a neglected problem: how to insure that new structures of schooling, once implemented, will stay in place. We review the findings of the International School Improvement Project (ISIP) on the topic of institutionalization, and suggest how they are applicable to the results of restructuring work.

Is the persistence of new structures automatically likely? We believe not, for several reasons:

1. Many people's conceptual grasp of the levels and content of "restructuring" is less than crisp, in spite of valiant efforts to clarify definitions and working concepts (David, 1987; Harvey & Crandall, 1988; Schlechty, 1989; Elmore and associates, 1990). Vagueness can only make for forward uncertainty.

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2. Restructuring work requires local users to unhook old assumptions, go beyond incremental change efforts, and often "remap" customary beliefs, values and assumptions. Such personal changes do not come easily.

3. Many people doing restructuring work seem not to realize that sophisticated design work, before implementation, is a much-needed activity, as Banathy & Jenks (1990) point out -- or that implementation problems are vastly more demanding than those involved in the installation of "part-innovations". So new structures may be weakly designed, or never get well into place, let alone continue.

4. Even if such problems are successfully solved, there is little guarantee that new "structures" of schooling, many of them counter to the culture of schools as we know them, will automatically stay in place and survive. The history of most reforms, in fact, suggests the opposite. Schools, like other organizations, have a way of weathering down changes, or subtly ejecting them, unless they are built in to the school, become embedded, a part and parcel of "normal life".

Institutionalization: A Neglected Topic

This last problem -- the problem of institutionalization -- has been a badly neglected topic in the study and practice of educational change (Miles, 1983). First, a bare-bones working definition is in order (adapted from Miles, Ekholm & Vandenberghe, 1987).

> Institutionalization is a developmental process occurring in organizations during and after the implementation of a change. It results in stabilization of the change, and its continuation.

Indicators that institutionalization is complete include: acceptance by relevant actors; routinization of the change and resources needed for it; widespread use of the change; firmly-expected continuation, regardless of personnel turnover; and legitimacy, "normality", "taken-for-grantedness", even "invisibility" of the change.

Over the past three decades, research on educational change has successively focused on "adoption", then "implementation", with little attention until recently to institutionalization (Fullan, 1983, 1991). It is understandable that policy-makers and school people alike tend to assume that worthy changes in schools will simply continue "on their merits", or because of individuals' enthusiasm and support.

But the lessons drawn from the ISIP review of studies of institutionalization across a range of disciplines and applied fields (Miles & Louis, 1987) emphasize that changes that are not embedded, built in to organizational structures and procedures, are unlikely to survive. Good student outcomes, or the pressure of advocates, are not enough.

The restructuring literature largely sidesteps the topic of institutionalization. The implicit assumption seems to be that major structural changes in schools' time schedules, curriculum content, teacher empowerment, student groupings, methods of assessment, and teaching strategies, will somehow automatically continue into the foreseeable future. The same assumption appears in relation to externally-linked restructuring efforts: parental choice, school-based management, new accountability systems.

But persistence of such changes cannot be taken for granted. Many are countercultural (for example, "teaching for understanding" conflicts with widespread norms about teaching -- that it consists mostly of direct teacher

talk, and transmission of knowledge (cf. the case studies introduced by Cohen & Ball, 1991). Other changes carry with them their own ironies and self-defeating struggles, as Glickman (1990) notes (for example, "The more an empowered school improves, the more apparent it is that there's more to be improved," and "The more a school becomes empowered, the more it hesitates to act."). Restructuring changes may also require very large amounts of new energy (for example, teacher engagement in school-wide planning and decision-making typically adds up to 20% of work time beyond classroom teaching and preparation (Louis & Miles, 1990).

So, though "structural" changes may appear firm and resistant to erosion, they may in fact be rather easy to reverse, undo, or back out of when the going gets tough -- as it inevitably will. The results of restructuring efforts may not stay restructured. There are some signs in the wind. Grant (1991) writes that teachers surveyed in Dade County, Florida, a vanguard district doing school-based management for the past three years, are showing some erosion in attitudes toward the program's value in their own and other schools, and principals have doubts as well ("the program has made my job harder", "accomplishments are not as impressive as at first").

ISIP's Initiative on the Topic of Institutionalization

Let's turn to what ISIP accomplished in this domain. ISIP researchers from twelve countries joined to study the concept of institutionalization and to synthesize research that could illuminate the process of institutionalization. A 1985 symposium in Switzerland resulted in a book - Lasting school improvement - in which five longitudinal/historical case studies were examined from four

different theoretical frames or perspectives (Miles, Ekholm and Vandenberghe, 1987).[2]

The five cases included:

- A study of three schools implementing a national reform in primary schools in Belgium.
- An analysis of three American schools using a program for writing skills.
- An account of the progress of a project-oriented form of education in a Dutch school.
- An historical analysis of how "study days" became a stable part of the Swedish educational scene.
- A study of three Dutch schools involved in a major secondary school reform.

The four theoretical perspectives used by four different case discussants to illuminate the cases were: a "managed change" approach; an "assimilation" perspective; a "cultural" framework and a "conflict" model.

The book also included an extensive literature review (Miles & Louis, 1987). It examined earlier studies of institutionalization in education, other public services, international development, organizational and administrative sciences, sociology, and cultural anthropology, sorting them into four general "conceptual frames": innovation management, implying planned, systematic change; social/cultural, emphasizing longer term shifts in structure and beliefs; organizational learning, stressing the redesign of structure and procedures, with associated learning by individuals; and social meanings, focusing on the development of shared social understandings.

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2 We'd like to acknowledge here the strong part that Roland Vandenberghe, our co-editor, played in the planning and implementation of the book. And to thank the 16 authors who participated: Robert Bollen (Netherlands), Mats Ekholm (Sweden), Uwe Hameyer (Germany), Peter Holly (U.K.), Henk Jansen (Netherlands), Sverker Lindblad (Sweden), Karen Seashore Louis (USA), Allan Menlo (USA), Matthew B. Miles (USA), Anne O'Shea (Northern Ireland), Peter Posch (Austria), William L. Rutherford (USA), Ria Timmermans (Netherlands), Uri P. Trier (Switzerland), Roland Vandenberghe (Belgium), and Marvin Wideen (Canada).

organizational learning, stressing the redesign of structure and procedures, with associated learning by individuals; and social meanings, focusing on the development of shared social understandings.

Key Conclusions of Our Work

Here we summarize what the ISIP work concluded about institutionalization: its general nature, its position in the change process, and what the literature review and case study analysis emerged with. Once the substance of our findings is clear, we can turn to implications for institutionalizing new school structures.

The nature of institutionalization

In all schools, all over the world, rules, practices, norms and procedures are institutionalized. Beginning teachers have to learn how daily school life is organized. Institutionalized practices create clarity and safety for organization members. As a result, energy can be directed toward the key aims of the organization.

Institutionalization, seen as a process, enables an organization to maintain stability while assimilating changes -- from small to major --into its structure.

We know that something is institutionalized when:

- o though it may have taken some negotiation, it is now agreed on, seen as fully legitimate and valuable by the key people involved.
- o it is working in a routine, stable way.
- o it is a natural, normal part of life, expected without doubt to continue; it may even be "invisible", taken for granted.
- o allocations of time, material and personal resources are routinely made for it.
- o these and other organizational supports are stable, and do not depend on specific persons for their continuance.

Institutionalization in the change process

The change process is often viewed as having three major subprocesses. Initiation involves the proposal of new ideas, mobilization of energy, and the choice to begin a change. Implementation means putting new ideas, activities or programs into practice. Institutionalization, our focus, means stabilizing and continuing the newly implemented change.

Though the three subprocesses are in a rough temporal sequence, we viewed each subprocess as leading toward and contained within the next (Fig. 1). Thus activities directly relevant to institutionalization may occur very near the beginning of a change process. For example, there may be agreement among key people, even at the initiation stage, that a change just being launched will be kept permanently in the school if it proves successful after two years.

We also noted that many implementation activities are in effect "preconditions" for institutionalization. For example, good implementation requires strong and sustained technical assistance, along with the development of ownership. Assistance helps people use an innovation more skillfully, and increases ownership. Both make for better implementation. But both also make for institutionalization: skillful, committed use helps to stabilize and continue the change.

At the same time, there are some activities late in the process that relate directly to institutionalization as such. For example, creating a routine budget line, or a new daily schedule that supports the innovation are important "embedding" decisions -- structural ones --that have a direct impact on institutionalization.

Key factors leading to institutionalization

What were ISIP's findings on the antecedents and causes of institutionalization?

Conclusions from the literature review. First, innovations which are substantial, of high quality, central to organizational purposes, and reasonably well- fitting to the local setting are more likely to get institutionalized.

Second, the local internal context makes a difference. Institutionalization of a change is more likely when a school is innovative, receptive, and supports collaboration among professionals; when its structures and procedures are well-integrated, with enough human and financial resources to manage change; and when there is a felt need and pressure exerted by an advocate for the change.

Third, the external context is important: for success, it should be reasonably stable, and exerting pressure for the innovation. It's important that the innovation is a good "fit" externally as well as internally.

Finally, the change process itself is perhaps most crucial for institutionalization success. The key factors are: stable, skilled leadership, having a clear vision, and using good coordination mechanisms; active interaction and participation by users of the innovation; vigorous mobilization and reinforcement through administrative and peer support, careful following of the innovation's progress and adaptation of it, and development of ownership through widespread, rewarding use; strong, sustained technical assistance; and direct effort to stabilize the innovation via widespread, good-quality implementation, removing the old while embedding the new, and allocating routine resources to support the change permanently.

Conclusions from the case study analysis. Looking across our five case studies, we identified seven "key factors" crucial for understanding institutionalization.

1. Policy-level confirmation. Institutionalization of a change is supported by policy activities - at local school, district and "central" or

state levels -- which create mutually reinforcing messages between the educational system in general and the schools involved in particular that the innovation will continue and remains important for the future.

2. Vision-building. Institutionalization of a change is facilitated by support activities that create opportunities for an ongoing "vision building" process that gives voice to important values, clarifies the change involved, enables schools to develop meaningful organizational behavior during the institutionalization phase, and supplies ongoing evaluation criteria.

3. External support. Institutionalization of a change is more likely to occur if external support-givers collaborate with the school in a school-tailored, need-responsive way. External support is needed for developing and constructing typical and adapted interventions (training, consulting, coaching, coordination, etc.) for schools institutionalizing any innovation, from small to substantial. As institutionalization of an innovation proceeds, the amount of external support decreases, but it may still be needed in case of unexpected problems or new developments.

4. Internal support. Institutionalization of a change has a better chance if a support structure within the school, created during the implementation process, remains functioning during the institutionalization phase. That is, internal capacity for support and assistance has been developed.

5. School leader attention to institutionalization. The institutionalization of a change is more likely to occur if there is a school leader (principal, headmaster, head teacher) who develops specific activities directed at maintaining the innovation. These may be support activities as such, structural or procedural interventions, or provision of resources.

6. Ownership. The institutionalization of a change is supported by the development of ownership. Administrators and teachers have the feeling that the

innovation belongs in their situation; they feel committed to it. Experiences during the implementation phase (for example, mastery, success with students, peer support) lead to a situation in which the staff consider the innovation their own.

7. Embedding. The institutionalization of a change is more likely to occur if innovation-related structures and procedures are embedded in the organization. For example, close linkage between curriculum development procedures and other changes, regular allocations of time, money, and materials, a new daily schedule, and altered job descriptions incorporating the change all indicate embedding.

Looking back at these conclusions, at least two general lessons are visible. First, factors which are important for <u>implementation</u> remain important for institutionalization. In other words, institutionalization is in part dependent on implementation success.

Second, institutionalization of a change is typically not monolithically determined, but assured by a favorable <u>configuration</u> of key aspects. One favorable configuration is the combination of a supportive central policy and an meaningful local policy. Another one is a lasting collaboration between external and internal support structures. Another example is an initiating and strong principal who aids vision-building, and confirms procedures and structures which become structurally embedded.

Helping New Structures Stay In Place

What will it take?

We return to our primary topic. Institutionalizing changes associated with restructuring may have some special requirements. First, we must remember that

we are dealing with change of the school, not change in the school. The language of "institutionalization" may seem an outworn relic of the 70's, when "implementing" "innovations" was often the focus. We believe, however, that ideas about institutionalization remain of extreme relevance.

Though restructuring deals with large-scale renewal and reform rather than part-innovations that can be dropped in to the school without altering structure, we should remember that even the most ambitious restructuring proposals do not completely transform the school. Most leave many familiar structures (e.g., the idea of classrooms, of a schedule, of a teacher, of cohorts of students, of subject matter domains, of accountability) in place, but configure them differently. Thus even change of the school represents an "innovation" -- though it is usually a large, complex, demanding bundle of many specific changes.

Second, it seems clear that any new "structure" contemplated for a school or its associated district and state: (a) must go through the usual tribulations of implementation; and (b) will itself require strong secondary structural support. That suggests the idea of "meta-structures" to accompany, stabilize and protect unwanted changes in (for example) scheduling, destreaming, school-based decision-making, or the teachers' work day from occurring.

Structures are, perhaps, just processes that change rather slowly. The cycle time may be six months or a year, but new, vulnerable structures can decay, be rejected, or be bent out of shape, just as specific "drop-in" innovations can. Thus the need for meta-structures.

There is a problem of infinite regress here: how can we be sure that the meta-structure itself will continue? The practical implication is that meta-structures should well built in, receiving extra priority and resources -- since

they in turn will support the continuation of other structural changes. For example, a radical change in daily time schedule that permits regular meetings of teachers and administrators makes a myriad of other changes easier. A multi-level steering group for restructuring can design and coordinate a wide range of new structural experiments. More examples will be suggested in the following action implications.

Action implications

The ISIP work suggested some action implications for those wanting to institutionalize changes in schools. Here we adapt them for the case of restructuring.

Applying alternate frames. The literature review and our first discussions of the cases showed us the importance of viewing institutionalization through alternate frames or perspectives. Much North American literature on educational improvement has emphasized a managed change perspective (Miles, 1987), implying willed, planful, active, intelligent problem-solving by a legitimated individual or group to achieve desired goals.

We did analyze the case studies using this familiar perspective, but added to it three others. One was a cultural change (Holly et al, 1987) perspective, emphasizing shared understandings and ideas that shape norms, structures and procedures and give meaning to what people do from day to day. Change considered in this frame can be seen as the encounter of the school's culture with the implied culture of the change itself, and the ebb and flow of mutual influence between them.

Another frame was assimilation (Posch, 1987), drawn from Piaget: the emphasis is on an organization confronted with an innovation, and how its

structures -- either tacit or explicitly visible -- change and adapt in a largely intuitive, dynamic way in response to the nature of the innovation.

The final frame was conflict (Lindblad, 1987), emphasizing differences of power, dominance, subordination and self-interest among groups and roles, existing in a historical context.

The implication here is: rationally providing "meta-structures" and managing the process of restructuring is not enough. Assuring the continuation of new structures requires confronting the conflicting interests involved, thinking of the work as a change in culture, not just technology, and tracking the fluid, perhaps unmanageable adaptations that occur as a school community assimilates new structures.

District-school congruence. Since schools are embedded in a larger context, which in North America involves a municipally-defined "district" or "board", we can predict that new structures at the school level are unlikely to be institutionalized unless they are reasonably congruent with district/board views.[3] Policy confirmation, in effect, is a necessary (though certainly not a sufficient) condition. While implementation of changes seems to work best when the district's stance is engaged (in contact with the school, collaborative) but non-bureaucratic (Louis & Miles, 1990), it seems likely that institutionalization will require bureaucratic permission (at the minimum), and more plausibly, a shared commitment to a restructured vision.

Energy resources. Ultimately, ISIP noted, institutionalization efforts are directed toward saving energy in the organization. Living routinely with an

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3 Smith & O'Day (in press) go further: they suggest that what looks like local conservatism in districts and schools is really a function of the complex, fragmented, incoherent state-level context, which makes multiple conflicting demands impossible to respond to.

incomplete or ineffective working pattern does not in itself take a lot of energy. But when organization members become conscious of an old pattern's ineffectiveness, and/or begin work on a new pattern, extra energy demands quickly appear.

But only minor parts of school life can, in the long haul, rely on temporary investment of heavy energy inputs like those normally involved in transitions. Routinization, like toothbrushing or hair-combing habits, saves energy. Well-institutionalized changes will either have to be as energy-saving as the structures they replace -- or an energy increment will need to be reallocated/stolen from somewhere else. Any other outcome is very likely to lead to burnout and non-institutionalization.

The long-distance runner. Even modest-scale innovations typically take 18 months to two years to institutionalize (Huberman & Miles, 1984); larger changes take longer. The ISIP work suggested a metaphor: would-be institutionalizers need to think of themselves as long-distance runners, expecting a long race with a non-sprinting start, and gauging their progress with careful timing and observation of colleague runners (i.e., other schools). Runners also deplete their resources (water, energy) and need refills; in schools, resource replenishment (ideas, money, assistance) will be required. Long-distance runners are also steady, avoiding extended rest stops; sustained effort (including visibility, rewards, steady monitoring and corrective action) is important for institutionalization.

A clear, shared vision. Given the ambitiousness and complexity of many restructuring efforts, it seems especially crucial for people in schools to articulate a shared "driving dream" that stands back of the ongoing change effort, articulating values, supplying direction, generating new activities, and

providing criteria for trouble-shooting. (Such visions are not only generated beforehand by direct "vision-building" work, but often emerge from the hurly-burly of implementation of particular sub-projects.) Ultimately, the will to embed something in the regular budget, schedule, and job descriptions depends on a shared value commitment.

Implementation as prefigured institutionalization. New structures, to put it mildly, are not self-implementing. They need to be put in place like any other real change in a real organization. The action implication from our work in ISIP is that we can hardly expect a weakly-implemented new structure to survive. A key part of implementation management is looking forward now to future supports, embeddedness, built-in-ness.

Transition management: diagnosis and constant monitoring. During transitions from a familiar to a new state of affairs, people must normally (a) confront loss of the old, and attach commitment to aspects of the new; (b) unlearn old behaviors, and learn new ones (for example, in relation to curriculum, pedagogy, organizational structures); and (c) move from anxiousness and uncertainty to stabilization and coherence. Coupled with these individual needs are the organizational-level demands of managing, coordinating, steering, adjusting, tuning, trouble-shooting that go with any major implementation effort.

The key meta-structure here, as Louis & Miles (1990) found, is a cross-role steering group, specifically empowered to manage the change. Such a group can learn from the diverse perspectives of its members. Most important, it can do problem diagnosis and close monitoring of actions taken. Louis & Miles also found that major reforms were most successful when such groups diagnosed aggressively ("problems are our friends", in effect), and dealt with difficult

problems through capacity-building and structural means, rather than taking a business-as-usual approach.

Emphasis on personal and organizational learning. For any significant change, transitions involve intense personal and organizational learning and problem-solving. The ISIP literature review emphasized this view strongly. Individuals need support for their quest for meaning, mastery and coherence -- and the organization needs, as Hedberg (1981) points out, to "learn" through institutional memory, standardization of procedures, and development of new symbols, myths and sagas.

A small-scale "meta-structure" was suggested in the ISIP analysis: maintenance of a "log book" that records changes made in the school, and the reasons for making them. The log book serves to maintain meaning and avoid self-evident justifications for a particular structure, wards off unnecessary re-invention, and interprets structure and associated procedures to new members of the school.

Routinization of internal support. As we've noted, change is always resource-hungry. This holds especially true for the provision of assistance. Louis & Miles (1990), for example, found that substantial reforms in high schools required at least 30 days a year of focused external assistance to be successful. More important, they discovered that very large amounts of internal assistance -- for training, consulting, coordination, capacity-building -- were typical in successful reforms.

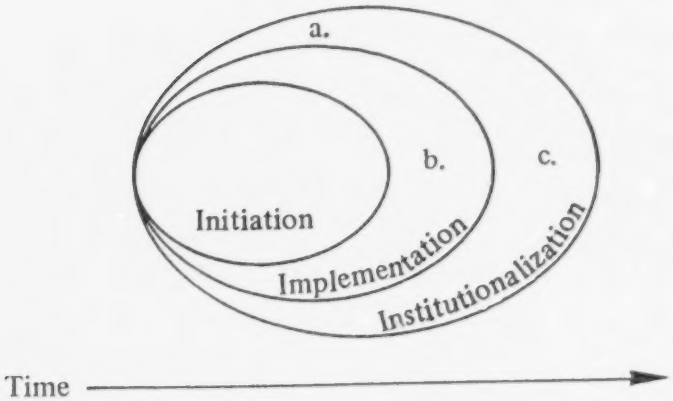
The "meta-structure" that seems most critical for successful institutionalization of new structures is a clearly-identified internal group (and associated roles) with line responsibility for staff (and organizational) learning and development. Such structures include cadres of internal trainers,

mentor teachers, staff development councils, and departments of human resource development. Strengthening local change capacity ("No training without training trainers") seems crucial for restructuring efforts (as it always has been for smaller-scale changes).

Avoiding staleness. The final irony of successful institutionalization is that new structures, as they become "normal", taken for granted, may become monotonous and spiceless. How to maintain interest and commitment when the high-energy days of implementation have passed? The ISIP analysis suggested (a) continuous critical examination (after all, a new structure that proves really boring may not have been well designed in the first place); (b) rewards for "lively and humorous" use of the new structure; (c) rotation of responsibilities, to avoid person-dependence; and (d) the protection of "alternative" structures to maintain variety, along with the allegiance of "resisters".

Will new school structures stay restructured? One hopes so -- at least for long enough to see what a restructured school looks and feels like, and what it does for the people who learn and work in it. We need to take more thought on the question of institutionalizing the new structures we are creating.

Figure 1
The Relation of Subprocesses of Change



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